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THE CRAYON.

VOL. II. NO. XIX.]

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 7. 1855.

[WHOLE NO. XLV.

REMINISCENCES OF JOHN R. SMITH.

MANY of our readers will recall with pleasure some recollections of the old drawing-master, John R. Smith, who for many years dwelt in this city in the diligent pursuit of his avocation. He has been some years gone, but his memory still dwells affectionately in the minds of his surviving scholars. The writer of this knew him well, was once his pupil, and for many years his friend and companion. His career of humble usefulness is fast falling into unmerited oblivion, and yet no one who ever knew the kind old man, can cease to retain a vivid recollection of his many and rare excellences, as well as of his quaint and almost middle-aged style of manner. "Old Dr. Syntax," as he used facetiously to style himself, was not an unapt type of that schoolboy myth. Mr. Smith came upon the stage of life, just as Morland and Ward, and their contemporaries, were passing from it. His father, a distinguished engraver and painter, was the companion of the noted generation of artists, who were almost as famous for their witty and eccentric convivialities, as for their excellence in their profession. Those "licensed vagabonds," as Mr. Smith styled them, more in affection than reproach, were much at his father's house, a circumstance which no doubt led his mind towards artistic pursuits. But their convivialities left no enduring taint, for his whole life was a model of temperance and virtue. His love of free institutions led him into some political difficulties, and availing himself of letters of recommendation from Allston and Stuart, whose friendship he had formed in England, he came out to this country, and settled in Boston, but afterwards moved to New York, and commenced the teaching of drawing. And a most thorough and efficient master was he. He was exactly placed. No mind could have been more perfectly constituted for a profession than his was for his darling pursuit. As might be logically expected, his success was equal to such rare merits. His classes at this time were large, and included among his pupils were many who afterwards distinguished themselves as artists. He kindled in his scholars an enthusiastic love for his art, and it may be stated without exaggeration, that no man of his time, however eminent, did more to encourage a love for the arts in America than this modest drawing-master. He did not so much aim at producing a certain cleverness of execution in his pupils, as the conveying a knowledge of principles as a foundation for future independent exertion. And herein consisted his great excellence, and one that distinguished him from the class to which he belonged—a race of arrant quacks, whose fooleries and knaveries I hope some day to see served up in the CRAYON by some competent pen. In Mr. Smith there was not one particle of sham, but a most vehement detestation of it. His love of truth was his failing, in this sense, that he gave offence by his outspoken criticisms and corrections. Few indeed of his pupils could always see their

interest in quietly enduring his remarks upon their errors; but to those who did, he became kind and encouraging, and exceedingly solicitous for their substantial progress. Mr. Smith was widely known and felt among the artists and amateurs of his day, for he was a severe and caustic critic, urging with fearless freedom his views of their works, and though always knowing and truthful, often giving bitter offence. His style was peculiar, and, like his conversation, illustrated by quaint and comic, though apt and telling, images. Many will recollect a series of papers published by him, under the title of "Neutral Tint," during the troublous times of the birth of the present National Academy of Design. They produced a strong impression, and had much to do with the sinking of the old institution.* He was the author of several works on drawing, of great merit, but now, unfortunately for learners, out of print. He illustrated his instructions on perspective by an exceedingly ingenious and valuable machine of his own invention. This machine demonstrated the truths of the science by an arrangement of miniature objects, such as buildings and trees, the perspective lines of which were indicated by cords and other devices. In this way the student saw the abstract truths of the art in their natural relations. His lectures upon this subject were attended by a great number of non-professional people, by professors of colleges and other learned men, with universal satisfaction.

Mr. Smith had several children, one of whom, now the best American scene-painter, J. R. Smith, jr., is exhibiting in this city a very excellent panorama of Europe. He was the originator of that modern style of picture, which is generally appreciated according to the number of miles it contains. We believe Banvard's panorama of the Mississippi, was originally the work of Mr. Smith.

The personal appearance of the elder Smith was very curious. His short figure, large head, peculiar one-sided gait, and indescribable expression of countenance, with its queer significance while uttering his rare witticisms, will recall a flood of pleasant memories at their bare mention. He was a man very much like, in figure and general aspect, to Turner, the great English landscapist.

Such an earnest, brave, true man, should not be too soon forgotten. His life was not a flaunting success, but many thousands have richly and gratefully profited by his teachings and example. Men were made rich by him, not he by them.

His death was characteristic and beautiful. At the age of about eighty, he had become quite infirm, but was able to sit up several hours every day. He rose one morning, ate his breakfast, read his morning paper, and according to his custom, fell asleep in his chair. His wife sat by his side, but thinking he slept longer than usual, looked at him more attentively, and found that he had thus quietly passed away.

R.

* The American Academy of the Fine Arts.

CORREGGIO:

A Tragedy by

ADAM OEHELENSCHLAGER.

Translated by Theodore Martin.

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE as in First Act.

MICHAEL.

It grieves me I lack leisure, else I'd carve
An allegoric statue for your hall,
Of Selfishness—the figure large as life.
I have the model ready to my hand.

(Observes ANTONIO, who has returned and resumed his work.)

What do I see? Per Bacco! as I live,
A painter, in his work abstracted,—lost!
Why, yes, it is so. Man, why beg of me,
When you possess here, at your very door,
Men who have both the power to paint, and
will?

BATTISTA (aside.)

I shall get nothing out of him, that's clear.
Well, I must turn his presence to account.

MICHAEL.

Who is that man, who paints so busily?

BATTISTA.

He is my best, most intimate of friends.

MICHAEL.

A choice recommendation! (aside.) If he be
As noble in his art as in his friendship,
He'll surely reach its highest pinnacle.

BATTISTA.

(Aside.) It works. (Aloud.) Great sir, you
ought indeed to know him!
He's an original genius;—does not mould
Himself on great examples, nor by study;
No, no; with him all comes by nature, straight,
From his own fancy. 'Tis the only way.
I often hear him say; 'for artifice
Destroys all real art.' There as he sits,
Though you'd not guess it by his looks, I swear,
He thinks he's more than match for Raphael!

MICHAEL.

A modest estimate!

BATTISTA.

And yet he is

A good and worthy creature; only he
Can't bear to hear of artists city-bred.
He thinks their life may be more brilliant, but
He calls it much outcry and little wool.

MICHAEL.

There he is right; sheep pasturing and wool
Thrive ever best where grass doth most abound.

BATTISTA.

His little son, too, has a deal of genius;
There is a sketch of his upon the wall.
His father gave him very little help.
You cannot fancy his delight, good soul!
When he observed the boy's dexterity.

MICHAEL.

I long to know a man of mark so great;
If such the apple, what must be the tree!

BATTISTA.

So please you, I will introduce you, sir,

MICHAEL.

As brother in the art.